

## **WHY LORDSHIP FAITH MISSES THE MARK FOR SALVATION<sup>1</sup>**

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Let's talk about why Lordship Faith misses the mark for salvation. Actually Lordship Salvation has changed the mark and they've accused us of missing the mark. So who lowered the standards anyway, and when did that happen?

The late comedian, George Burns, used to joke that a good friend invited him to join a country club. He said he wasn't interested. This friend said, "What do you mean you're not interested? This is an exclusive club." And Burns said, "I would never join a club that would have me as a member." So who lowered the standard anyway?

We in the Free Grace movement are accused of lowering the standards for getting into heaven. We are accused of "easy believism." We are charged with a view that is "no-lordship." John MacArthur refuses to even acknowledge us as the "Free Grace" movement. He calls us the "no-lordship movement."<sup>2</sup>

Are we going to let these terms go unchallenged? You know sometimes if you are allowed to frame the question you win the debate, right? It's kind of like if I ask you "Have you stopped beating your wife yet, Bob?" How do you answer that? You lose either way. You

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<sup>1</sup> This article is from a message originally delivered March 30, 1999 at the Grace Evangelical Society's pastor's conference. It has been edited slightly for publication.

<sup>2</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 56.

pastors have been in this dilemma before. You answer the phone and someone wants to know about your church and they say, “I was just wondering, are you a full gospel church?” I’m always tempted to say, “Well no, we’re a half gospel church. Our budget is kind of tight this month.” Or how about this one: “Are you a spirit filled church?” “No, we’re the carnal church in town. We’re just kind of struggling along in the flesh right now.”

We can’t allow them to frame the question and swing the debate. So what are *their* standards for salvation if we teach “easy believism?” Are their standards for salvation even attainable by people? Well, let me read you something from a book called *Real Christians* about an occasion where a fellow went to an evangelistic meeting and heard and responded to the message. Afterwards he spoke to an evangelist who said that, “In light of all that we have talked about this evening, can you think of any reason why you should not become a Christian tonight?” The young man sat for a few moments thinking and he said, “No I cannot think of any reason.” Then the evangelist said, “Then let me give you some.” And for the next few minutes he began to explain the cost of being a Christian. He talked about the young man’s need to surrender his whole life, his future, his ambitions, his relationships, his possessions, and everything that he was, to God. And only if he was prepared to do this, he explained, could Christ begin to work effectively in his life. And then the evangelist leaned even closer toward him and said, “Can you still not think of any reason why you shouldn’t become a Christian tonight?” And the man said, “I can think of some now.” So the evangelist said, “In that case, do not become a Christian until you have dealt with every one of those reasons and are willing to surrender everything to Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Well, somebody has changed the standards, but exactly *who* has changed the standards? And have they made salvation unattainable? You know, there’s a lot at stake in this whole

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Price, *Real Christians* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), 55-56.

debate about faith and its meaning. What is at stake, of course, is the clear Gospel, our confidence in sharing the Message, our assurance of salvation, our Christian life, growth, joy, and happiness. There's a lot at stake. But let's not forget the main thing at stake is not theology, but the souls of people who can be misled. That is what is at stake.

So how does Lordship Salvation understand faith? Now I'm going to be talking about their understanding of faith today, and I'm going to be giving some answers from my perspective. I just want to tell you that what I'm talking about is in my doctoral dissertation which is available to you today if you want to get that.<sup>4</sup> So I'm saving you a lot of footnotes and technical exposition and so forth just to cover the main points. I devote a whole chapter to this subject and there you'll find many more sources.

How does Lordship Salvation understand faith? Lordship Salvation is basically defined by its own understanding of faith because faith is really the heart of the issue. For example, Kenneth Gentry, a leading proponent of Lordship Salvation has a classic definition. He says,

The Lordship view expressly states the necessity of acknowledging Christ as the Lord and Master of one's life in the act of receiving Him as Savior. These are not two different, sequential acts (or successive steps), but rather one act of pure trusting faith.<sup>5</sup>

So what they are saying is that we come to Christ as Savior. We also come to Him submitting to Him as Lord. It is not two acts, it is one act, and that is called faith. Lordship Salvation faith includes certain elements by their very definition. And it takes it way beyond

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<sup>4</sup> Charles C. Bing, *Lordship Salvation: A Biblical Evaluation and Response* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), GraceLife edition (Burleson, TX: GraceLife Ministries, 1997). The dissertation is available through GraceLife Ministries, at P.O. Box 302, Burleson, TX, 76097, or at the Web site, *GraceLife.org*.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, "The Great Option: A Study of the Lordship Controversy," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (Spring 1976): 52.

the Free Grace definition and understanding of faith as being convinced and persuaded of what is true.

They say that faith is submission, for example. Another proponent says, "...true saving faith includes in it a submission to the Lordship of Christ."<sup>6</sup> And another, "Saving faith is trust in Christ himself. It is a commitment of self in submission to all of Christ that is revealed."<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur says, "Saving faith, then, is the whole of my being embracing all of Christ. Faith cannot be divorced from commitment;" and, "The call of the gospel is to trust Him (cf. John 5:39-40). That necessarily involves some degree of love, allegiance, and surrender to His authority."<sup>8</sup> Bailey E. Smith asserts that "...saving faith is not mere intellectual assent, but it involves an act of submission on our part."<sup>9</sup>

Quite a plethora of authors state essentially the same thing, that faith is submission; submission that goes beyond our need for eternal life, to recognizing, acknowledging, and committing ourselves to Jesus Christ as Master of all of our lives.

But the Lordship Salvation definition of faith not only involves submission, it involves obedience. We have them saying these kinds of things: "Disobedience," MacArthur says, "is unbelief. Real faith obeys."<sup>10</sup> You'll notice how carefully he couched that. Disobedience is

<sup>6</sup> Richard P. Belcher, *A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992), 24.

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, *Faith Works*, 45, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Bailey E. Smith, *The Grace Escape: Jesus as Savior and Lord* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 77.

<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan

unbelief, but he doesn't say that faith is obedience. But he also says, "True faith is humble, submissive obedience;" and, "...faith encompasses obedience...faith is not complete unless it is obedient."<sup>11</sup> Later on, I think John MacArthur, after facing a lot of criticism, cleaned up his language. You won't find the same kind of quotes he used in his first book as you will in his second book, *Faith Works*. Another says, "The opposite of saving faith is disobedience."<sup>12</sup> Saucy concludes, "...we have to acknowledge some aspect of obedience as inherent in saving faith as well."<sup>13</sup> And then Mueller says, "Faith is synonymous with obedience."<sup>14</sup>

And so Lordship Salvation faith goes beyond trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior to obeying Him as Lord as part of the Gospel. They have included obedience in their definition and understanding of faith. With that definition and understanding, Lordship Salvation requires certain things of faith. It requires that works is a necessary condition of faith. MacArthur said, "The true test of faith is this, does it produce obedience? If not, it is not saving faith."<sup>15</sup> And Mueller says, "The true faith that saves (justifies) is the faith that also produces appropriate works (sanctifies)."<sup>16</sup>

We know that the Roman Catholics teach that we are saved by faith *plus* works.

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Publishing House, 1988), 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 140, 173.

<sup>12</sup> Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Saucy, "Second Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James'" by John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 47.

<sup>14</sup> Marc Mueller, "Lordship Salvation Syllabus" (Panorama City, CA: Grace Community Church, 1981, 1985), 20.

<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Mueller, 22.

Lordship Salvation teaches that we are saved by faith *that* works. But do not both definitions include works as a condition necessary for faith to be valid, for faith to be effectual? Either way, works are a necessary condition of faith.

But I have a problem with that. It confuses justification with sanctification. Justification as the forensic, legal declaration that we are righteous in our position before God, is confused with sanctification, the outworking of that righteousness in everyday practical living. Now we know that justification and sanctification are related. But we also must keep them distinct lest we confuse the Gospel itself and undo the Reformation. If we make works a necessary condition of salvation, of faith, it confuses faith with works, contrary to the words of Rom 4:4-5, “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” The apostle Paul is teaching us that faith does not mix with works in any way. Just as you cannot mix oil with water, faith is opposed to works for salvation.

Didn't Jesus teach this also in John chapter 6? When the Jews came to Him and followed Him across the lake after having been fed the fish and the bread, and Jesus saw how earnestly they were seeking Him and they said to Him, “Master, what must we do to do the works of eternal life?” Here the Jews were exposing their pharasaical theology and the baggage that they had from the Pharisees made up of the minutia of laws, and the extrapolations of laws, and thousands upon thousands of man-made interpretations. So they say to Him, “What shall we do that we may work the works of God?” And Jesus gives an interesting reply in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” Now notice that Jesus uses the same word they started with, *work*, but He puts it in the singular. He says this is the *work* of God. “You want to talk about works. That's how you're conditioned.” Jesus says this is

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the *work*, with a play on words. What is that work? That work is to believe. But of course, believing isn't a work at all, is it? In other words, this is what God requires of you, not works, but one thing, that is to believe.

Then He goes on in John chapter 6 to explain what it means to believe. He uses the analogy of eating and drinking. It's interesting that He would choose that kind of word picture to illustrate what faith is: a passive appropriation of something. Not doing, not working, not an active work, but a passive appropriation. That's the essence of faith. How can anyone call eating or drinking hard work? If eating and drinking is hard work, some of us need to take a break!

To make works a necessary condition of faith confuses grace with merit. The Scriptures are clear that we cannot confuse grace with merit lest we boast (Eph 2:8-9). It confuses *Christ's* work with what *we* are required to do. We are required to believe in order to be saved. Who did the obedience for our salvation? It was Jesus Himself that obeyed. Romans 5:19, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." It's not *our* obedience that saves us, it's *Christ's* obedience that saves us. We are the recipients of that blessing of the work that He has done for us. The only command for an unbeliever to obey is the command to believe the gospel.

So I have a problem with works as a necessary condition of faith. But Lordship proponents also require of faith that works must be *quantified*. For example, MacArthur says, "The fruit of one's life reveals whether that person is a believer or an unbeliever. There is no middle ground."<sup>17</sup> Also in his book he says that fruit has to be abundant and obvious. You can't go scrounging around looking for it.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 178.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

I have a problem with that too. When we look for fruit as proof of one's salvation, that immediately turns us into fruit inspectors who must inspect each person's fruit with arbitrary standards. I don't feel comfortable in that role, do you?

I have a question for those who want to inspect fruit to prove salvation: Who has the list of appropriate works that qualify somebody as a Christian? If they were to show me a list, I would like to ask them a second question: Who wrote the list? Where did you get this? I see no list of fruits or works listed in the Scriptures that prove one is a Christian. I think it's a rather presumptuous attitude for any believer to think that they can judge by a person's outward works whether or not that person is saved.

You see, it's a slippery thing, it's a relative thing, fruit is. What may be fruit in one person's life may be different to another. We have different starting points when we become believers. Some of us start way down on the scale. Fruit for us might be just breathing out a short prayer before we go to bed at night. On the other hand, fruit for someone who has been in church all of his life might be a more intense prayer life. How can anybody measure what God is doing in the inner workings of our heart and soul, and how He is prompting us in and through His Word? How can anyone know what someone is doing in secret as far as prayer and Bible study or good works is concerned? I think it's quite a presumptuous attitude to think that we can look at somebody and judge them by their fruits. I don't think that's comparing apples with apples, if we can extend the analogy a little bit.

When we look to fruits as proof of faith, it necessarily breeds insecurity and doubt. Am I doing enough? Do I have enough fruit? Is my fruit ripe enough? There are problems with quantifying our faith.

But their definition of faith also requires that faith must be *qualified*. Not only

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quantified, but qualified. And so you will read Lordship Salvation teachers using a lot of terms to qualify faith, sometimes to disqualify faith with negative terms like “spurious faith,” “counterfeit faith,” “intellectual faith,” “false faith,” “insincere faith,” “pseudo faith,” “emotional faith,” and “head faith,” all of which you will not find in the Bible. On the other hand they will want to qualify faith, in a positive way, with words like “true faith,” “authentic faith,” “saving faith,” “personal faith,” “real faith,” “efficacious faith,” and “heart faith,” all of which terms you will not find in the Bible.

Now there is a convenience to using terms like *saving faith* to know what we’re talking about. And sometimes the debate forces us to talk about *free* grace, which is a redundancy, *saving* faith, which is a redundancy, and things like that. But they want to say that there are different kinds of faith, and I have a problem with that. When we talk about different kinds of faith, we are distracted from the object of our faith to having faith in our faith. That’s an unhealthy introspection. Am I having enough faith? Am I having the right kind of faith? Is my faith deep enough, strong enough? When we look to our faith instead of to the object of our faith, we are necessarily distracted from that which actually saves us. Even Benjamin Warfield, the Presbyterian, who probably would not want to put himself in our camp, said that “the saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith, or the attitude of faith, or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith.”<sup>19</sup>

It’s like our eyesight. Eyesight is nothing apart from the object of our sight. We may as well close our eyes and look inside to see whether we have sight, as to look inside to see whether we have faith. Faith means nothing without an object, as sight means nothing without an object.

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<sup>19</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “Faith,” in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 404-44, ed. Samuel Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952), 425.

So they talk about different kinds of faith, forcing unfortunate folks to examine what kind of faith they have. The truth is, technically, we're not saved *by* faith anyway. We're saved *through* faith. Faith is the instrumental means, grace is the efficient means, of our salvation. We're saved by Jesus Christ. We're saved by His grace. We're saved through faith. You would know what I meant if I said to you "I put the fire out with the hose." Now hoses don't put out fires. But hoses are the channels for water that puts the fire out. The hose is the instrumental means; the water is the efficient means. Faith is the instrumental means by which we are able to access our salvation through Jesus Christ, His grace, His death, His resurrection.

So there's an unhealthy emphasis on faith that causes an unhealthy introspection. When we emphasize the quality of one's faith, we automatically de-emphasize the object of one's faith. I heard the story of a man who went to an evangelistic meeting. He responded to the message, and afterwards spoke to a counselor. The counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. The man went to the meeting the next night, heard another message, responded to the message again, and talked to a different counselor. This counselor told him that to be saved he must believe in Jesus. Later the man was giving his testimony on how he had been saved while talking to that second counselor. And the first counselor came up to him afterwards and said, "I'm a bit confused. Can you tell me, what did the second counselor tell you that I didn't tell you?" And the man said, "Well, you told me to *believe* in Jesus." He told me to "believe in *Jesus*." There's a difference, a big difference. It is the object of our faith that saves us.

Genuine faith in a worthless object is useless. You may have strong faith, get into a leaky boat, and get wet. You may have weak faith and get into a good boat and stay dry. You can sincerely believe in an error. I have a friend who was given a penicillin shot with the sincere belief by the doctor that it would make her well. It almost killed her. You can sincerely

believe in an error. We are not to look at the kind of faith we have. If it is faith indeed, and the Bible just calls it faith and doesn't qualify it, if it is faith indeed in the right object, it will save us.

Think of the Passover. The Jews were told to do something very unusual, put the blood of a lamb on the doorpost of their homes and they would be saved. The angel of death would pass over. I imagine some did that with full confidence in God's promise as was delivered to them through Moses and Aaron. I imagine there were some that said "I don't know about this." I imagine there were others who did it with a chuckle in their voice, "Yeah, right, a lamb's blood." But everybody who had enough faith to put blood on their doorpost was saved that night. We don't examine the kind of attitude they had; God examined the blood.

If we grant to them that faith must be qualified, that there are different kinds of faith, we surrender objectivity to subjectivity. And assurance becomes impossible. To have faith in one's faith is to detract from faith in a Savior. There is only one kind of faith. There are many objects to faith, but what saves us is Jesus Christ as the object of our faith.

Now the Lordship Salvation definition of faith also requires that faith must be a gift of God. For example, MacArthur says that faith is a "saving energy" that it is "divinely produced."<sup>20</sup> He believes it is different from other kinds of faith. He calls it "a supernatural ability to apprehend spiritual reality invisible to the eye of flesh."<sup>21</sup> If it's a supernatural ability, if it's divinely produced, if it's a saving energy, it must be God's gift. And you see how all this fits together. If faith includes obedience, then it must be a gift of God. He gives it to us, so we automatically obey. It's all kind of a package deal. MacArthur says, "the faith God begets

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<sup>20</sup> MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 28, 172-73.

<sup>21</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Faith According to the Apostle James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (March 1990): 23.

includes both the volition and the ability to comply with His...In other words, faith encompasses obedience.”<sup>22</sup>

Now I know that there are people who are Free Grace who believe that faith is a gift of God. I have a little problem with that interpretation, though, when I understand what faith is. I think it confuses grace with faith, again, the efficient means of salvation with the instrumental means of salvation. And in Eph 2:8-9 where it talks about “by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it* is the gift of God,” *it* refers to salvation by grace through faith, that process, that opportunity, what God has done in allowing us that salvation. I don’t think Paul is talking about just faith.

If faith is a gift of God, it nullifies our human responsibility. Think about that. God requires us to believe in order to go to heaven. If we do not believe, we will be condemned. John 3:18 says, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” God condemns those who do not believe. But we can’t believe unless we have God’s gift of faith. God condemns those to whom He does not give the gift of faith? That is unjust and unfair. You see, it just doesn’t make sense to me. And we know that God enlightens us to the truth, that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment. God draws us to Himself by illumining us to His Word, His truth. But ultimately it is faith that responds to God’s revelation of Himself. So I don’t believe that faith is a gift of God, or anything supernatural. There’s only one kind of faith. It is that which is persuaded of something and the truth about something. What differs is not faith itself, but the object of faith.

And then Lordship Salvation requires that faith must be difficult. Here’s where they

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<sup>22</sup> MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 173.

really get in our face. They accuse us of easy-believism. They say that we've lowered the standard, that we've cheapened God's grace. Faith, they say, is not easy. Well then, what is faith, I have to ask. Now I'm comfortable saying that faith is simple. But I would never say that faith is easy.

I would say that faith is simple because of verses like John 3:16. That's why we teach it to our children, because it teaches the simple way to salvation. A child can understand John 3:16. But don't forget the illustration in John 3:14-15 about the serpent in the wilderness from Numbers 21. There John is pointing to that story where in the wilderness those who had been afflicted with the poisonous serpents were told to look and live: "Look at the bronze serpent that was raised up and you will live." John takes that imagery in his book to John chapter 3 and compares that act of looking to believing. How simple can you get? The people didn't have to, as John MacArthur says, drag and struggle to get to the serpent to look at it.<sup>23</sup> That's eisogesis if I've ever heard it. Look and live! You can't get any simpler than that.

Now here's a dictionary definition of *simple*. Simple means having only one part, not complex, without additions, pure, and unadulterated. I have no problem calling my Gospel a simple Gospel based on that definition.

On the other hand, the dictionary definition of *easy* is: not difficult, free from pain and trouble, comfortable. You see, they are really not the same thing, simple and easy.

So, the Lordship Salvation folks accuse us of easy-believism. Well, if they are right, then they must believe in the opposite of easy-believism. What is the opposite of easy? I got my Thesaurus out. Here are some words for the opposite of easy: arduous (they believe in arduous believism), difficult, exhausting (they believe in exhausting believism), grueling believism, hard believism, rugged believism (better known as Grizzly Adams believism), strict believism,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 46.

stringent, tough, wearisome believism. Exactly what are they trying to tell us then? Do those words describe the offer of salvation that Jesus brought to the world? Of course not. Jesus, over and over again, showed how simple it was to be saved, how accessible salvation was. He said to just ask and it will be given to you. He said to take, take it freely.

Look at the Gospel of John, the book that was written to tell us how to be saved. There in John's Gospel we see analogy after analogy picturing the simplicity of faith. I've already mentioned the one in John 3. He also uses words like *know*, *receive*, *eat*, *drink*, *come*, *enter*, *hear*. None of these invoke works, or a struggle, or anything difficult. All of them are simple, passive responses. We hear, we see, we come, we enter.

So is believing easy? Believing really isn't easy. It is simple, but not easy. It's not easy for me to believe that I'm such a bad sinner that God would send me to hell. It's not easy to believe that there's nothing I can do to earn His favor. It's not easy for me to believe that God became a man, was born of a virgin, that He lived a perfect life, and that He died on a cross for me. And that when He did that, He took all of my sins upon Himself. That's not easy to believe. It's not easy for me to believe that He rose from the dead. And then it's not easy for me to believe that He left a few words behind that, if I believed them 2000 years later, would save me forever.

Let me give you an illustration of the difference between simple and easy. For my fortieth birthday my wife gave me a special birthday present. Perhaps to ward off the effects of the mid-age crisis, she gave me a gift certificate for one free skydive. You wonder what your wife is up to when you get a free skydive. But I checked my life insurance and it had not been tampered with.

Well, skydiving is really a simple concept, is it not? You go up in a plane. You jump

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out of a plane. But it's not easy. Actually, it's even simpler these days because what they do is a tandem jump. They actually clip a guy onto your back with "D" rings. And then you cram into a little plane, almost with a shoehorn. They take you up to 13,000 feet. You look down, and everything is in miniature. You're in the clouds and you get second thoughts and wish you weren't there, and you're thinking, "Get me out of here. I'll never see my wife and children again." But it's too late. And they open the door and they say "Get ready!" And you're looking down there and you don't want to go, but your instructor says "1, 2, 3, Go!" and you go because you're attached to him. You see how simple it is? Anybody can do it. But it's not easy.

What could be simpler than what God said in Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"? Believe and you'll be saved. To a pagan Roman jailer who knew no theology, He says "believe and you'll be saved." What could be simpler?

"Oh, but wait a minute," the Lordship Salvation folks want to say. "It says believe in the *Lord Jesus Christ*." And into that title *Lord* they import all of their theology. You must be willing to submit to Him and serve Him as the Master of your life, they say. But, what would *Lord* mean to a pagan Roman jailer? The word *Lord* would first of all mean deity. Deity is not just God's mastership, but it stands for God as Creator, Judge, King, and Prophet also. Did the jailer need to understand all that? Did he have to become a theology student in order to be saved? They make too much of a title given to Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That very same title, by the way, is used in Acts 16:30, where the jailer says to Paul and Silas "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The word *Sirs* is the same word in the plural that is translated *Lord* in the singular in that passage. In verse 34 there is a strong clue that the jailer understood it as deity where it says "Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God..." The object of the jailer's faith was God, God's Word, God's promise. He believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So faith is simple. Faith is so simple that unfortunately millions miss it. Faith is so simple, though, that we can teach children how to be saved. We can teach them a verse like John 3:16 and show them the way to heaven. Now we have to make a decision here. If John 3:16 is not the gospel, then we need to stop teaching it to our children. We need to stop making it the first verse that they memorize. And the guy that wears that John 3:16 shirt to the football games needs to be told to change his shirt—It's not enough.

Do we teach easy-believism? Friends, if I teach easy-believism, so does the apostle John, and I'm willing to go down with the ship. If it's good enough for John, it's good enough for me.

Salvation is simple; its not easy. What's distressing to me in all of this, as a pastor and as one with the heart of an evangelist, is that what they have done is taken salvation, which God intended to be accessible, and have made it inaccessible. After all is said and done, what we know is that God loves people and wants to see them saved. And because He wants to see them saved, He wants to make it simple. He did the hard work, so that we could bring a simple message to people, so that they could be saved.

Salvation is not meant to be an exclusive club. It is meant to be broad in its appeal and accessible to everyone. You know I've recently changed my perspective on John 14:6, where Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I used to be apologetic about that verse. You know what I mean. People would say "That's such an exclusive verse, such a narrow religion, such a narrow view of heaven." I started thinking about that and I decided that it was an inclusive verse. You see, anybody can come to Jesus. Not everybody can keep the seven pillars. Not everybody can do the five steps. Not everybody can keep the law, or all the other systems that the religions of the world offer, but anybody can come to Jesus. I will never ever again "apologize" for John 14:6. It makes the

way of salvation accessible to anyone.

If you want somebody to be rescued, delivered, or saved, you make it simple for them. You make it as simple as possible so that as many as possible can be saved. That's why we don't make flotation devices out of Teflon. That's why in emergencies people simply dial 911, not 911-10-10-321, or whatever. God wants people to be saved. And He designed His Gospel that way, so that even a child can believe. A man on his deathbed can believe. A thief on a cross can believe. What did the thief on the cross promise Jesus when he said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"? And Jesus replied, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Could the thief walk an aisle? No, his feet were fastened to a cross. Could he raise his hand? No, his hands were tied or nailed to the cross. Could he be baptized? No, the cross would have floated. Did he promise Jesus anything? No. Did Jesus demand anything of him? No. Salvation by grace through faith means you have hope for a dying man, for someone who can do nothing for himself.

I had a person in my congregation whose father was dying of cancer. I asked him if he had talked to his father about how to have eternal life. He said that he had talked with him, but he said that at the end of his life it wouldn't be fair for God to forgive him of all he had done now that he was dying. I told him to show his father the story of the thief on the cross. Since when is grace ever fair? Grace is not fair, it gives us what we don't deserve. By definition, grace is not fair.

Let me tell you about another thief I met. On my first visit to Ghana, West Africa, to teach the Bible at a Bible College, I was working on a car in our compound one day when I heard a commotion that was working itself down a dirt road. I immediately recognized what it was because I had seen it before—they had caught a thief. Now in Ghana when you catch a thief you take justice into your own hands because you have very little provisions and the

police are corrupt. And so what they usually do to a thief is beat him severely and let him go. I went out to the gate of the compound and looked there at fifty or sixty young people with smiles on their faces like they were having a big old time. They carried sticks, clubs, machetes, axes, and rubber hoses. And there in the middle was a rather tall fellow, blood streaming down his face, a large gash in his head, and a tire around his neck. And when I came to the gate of the compound, they all stopped and looked at me because we were the only *obruni*, or white folks in the area. They were wondering what I would do, if I would stop the proceeding. But you know, when you're in another culture you really don't know what to do sometimes. You don't want to interfere with their system of justice. And so I just turned and went back to my work figuring that they would give him a severe beating and that he would learn his lesson.

When I went back to work a missionary who was living on the compound that we shared came over to us. Now this missionary was from a different denomination that really believes a different gospel. We just happened to make his acquaintance for the summer. And he said "Hey did you see the thief?" And I said that I had seen him. He told me they were going to burn him. When I asked what he meant, he told me that the tire around his neck was filled with kerosene and they were going to light it and burn him. That friends, is called a "Nigerian necklace" over there. That's when I knew we had to do something. We walked to the other side of the compound where they had looped around. When we went out that gate, there he was collapsed in the mud. He still had the tire around his neck and was thoroughly drenched in kerosene. There was a young teenager standing above him with a can that had contained the kerosene, and another teenager was standing above him getting ready to strike a match. We worked our way through the group and asked if we could talk to the man. We told them we were *sofu*, which means *preacher*. My missionary friend began to ask the crowd if there were any accusers or witnesses. There were none. And as he did, I knelt down to talk to this fellow. I

said “What is your name.” He said “Benjamin.” I said “Benjamin, can you understand English?” He said “yes.” I said “Benjamin, I may not be able to help you and save you, but I can tell you how to have eternal life. Do you understand?” He said “yes.” In the precious few seconds I had with him I explained to him the Gospel of grace and the way of salvation.

To make a long story short, we were able to get him up amidst the protests of the crowd and get him off to a hospital from which he later fled, because if you saw the hospitals there you would flee too. I don't know if I'm going to see Benjamin in heaven, but the point of my story is that I had a message for a dying thief in the mud that no other religion in this world could have brought him. Do you understand that? Do you understand that the Gospel of grace through simple faith is a message for a young child, for a dying thief on a cross, a dying thief in the mud, a pagan Philippian jailer? It's the only message of hope. It's the only message of certainty, the only message of security that brings assurance. I don't apologize for the Gospel of faith. God has made salvation available to anybody, anywhere, anytime. Selah.